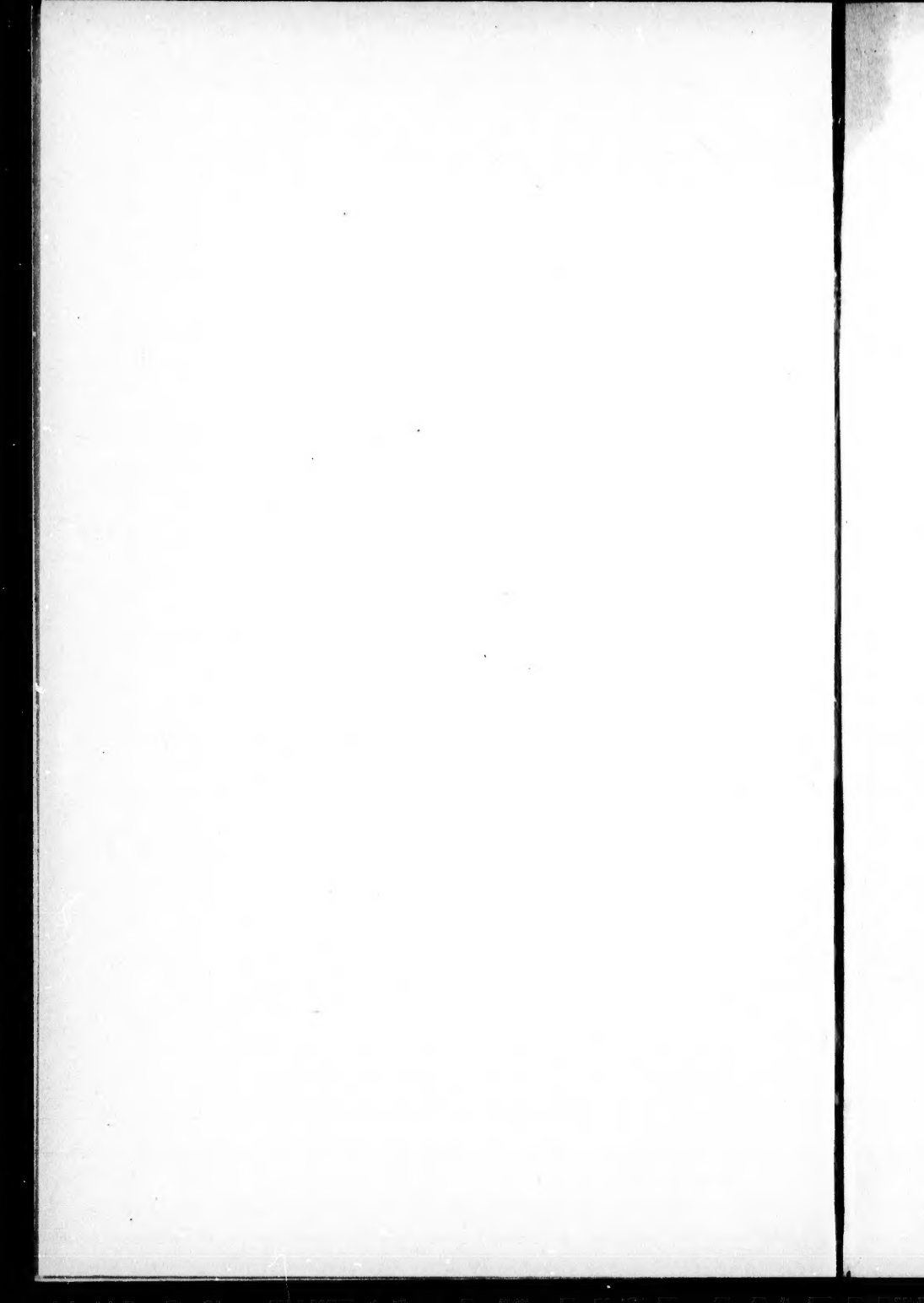




The Rev St. W. Tippet
Queen'sbury
"FAINT, YET PURSUING,"

AN

ORDINATION SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST CHURCH,

FREDERICTON,

ON THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT, 1856,

AND PUBLISHED

AT THE REQUEST OF SOME MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION,

BY

JOHN, BISHOP OF FREDERICTON.

FREDERICTON:

T. SIMPSON, PRINTER TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY

1856.

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To the Honorable John Simcoe Saunders, M. L. C., &c. &c.

MY DEAR SIR,

A request was conveyed to me by yourself and others of the congregation, who heard the following Discourse, that I would allow it to be printed. I have much pleasure in acceding to your request, because I am conscious that the Sermon lays claim to no other merit than that of being a plain, and I hope faithful exposition of doctrine and duty ; and I have, therefore, every reason to believe that the request proceeded from a desire to profit by the truths which the text enforces on us all. I may add, that it is more brief than usual, having been written under great bodily depression and weakness. Commending myself to the prayers of all who may read it,

I am,

My dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

JOHN FREDERICTON.

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SERMON.

Judges viii. 4.—“ *And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing.*”

In the various accounts which the sacred writers have left us of the deliverances of the Israelites from their oppressors, one idea is prominently put forward, and seems designed to be impressed on the mind of the reader, that their deliverance was wholly owing to the power of God. As their punishment came from God, though inflicted by human agents, so their deliverance came from God, though wrought by human agents. Many of the actors in these scenes were men of remarkable intellectual powers, and possessed of no common strength, skill, and sagacity; yet had they trusted to these powers alone, they would have been over-matched. Could Moses, though mighty in words and deeds, have contended successfully with the hosts of Pharaoh? Would Joshua have proved himself equal to the contest with the warlike tribes of Canaan? Would Gideon have overcome the Midianitish host with three hundred men? Could Samson, by brute force, or cunning, have discomfited the Philistines? The answer is the same in every instance. Not by their own power or might was this triumph gained, but thine arm, O Lord, hath gotten Thee the victory.

In this respect we desire you, my brethren, to observe a great difference between the Bible, and the turn of thought adopted by writers of our own day. The Bible, though it never multiplies miracles needlessly, nor deals in mere

wonders to gratify curiosity, ever traces second causes to the first, and leads us up to things supernatural. Its lessons are *objective*. It gives our faith an object to build upon beyond ourselves. Writers in our own age desire to reduce all supernatural accounts to the level of common occurrences; ascribe all things to secondary causes; put out of sight the agency of Divine Providence; and would make truth entirely *subjective*. In other words, such writers would have us believe nothing beyond our own self-consciousness, and the discoveries attainable by man himself. This reaction from believing too much to believing too little, is, however, as much to be dreaded, as the credulity of the superstitious. And perhaps even credulity is chiefly dangerous, when it ascribes second causes to beings lower than God; to the Divine Creator we can scarcely ascribe too much, or consider his influence as too wide, taking care never to ascribe to Him what is little, mean, or morally evil.

But the disposition which finds in every event the superintending hand of Providence, which marks its path in history, discovers it in the fulfilment of prophecy, and above all in the history of Israel, which derives from it lessons for its own conduct adapted to totally different circumstances, is surely far better than the disposition which ever doubts the supernatural, ascribes great results to the unaided power of man, and is unable to find any object above the earth to rest its hopes upon. God has indeed implanted in every manly breast the principle of self-reliance; and there is no man who is not the better for being forced to exert all the energies of which his nature is capable. But we must be very careful to understand when self-reliance is a virtue, and when it becomes dangerous, and even anti-christian. The self-reliance of

St. Paul was the energy of a christian martyr, when he said, "I can do all things;" but had he stopped there, his virtue would not only have been incomplete, but might have degenerated into self-confidence. But he says, "I can do all things *through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" The union of these clauses constitutes christian virtue. Before we can rely on ourselves, we must know and acknowledge our weakness, guiltiness, yea, nothingness, in the sight of God. Having made this acknowledgment we must rely wholly on His aid. Having sought His aid, we must also discover our duty, and see our way clearly on this point. And having seen our duty clearly, we must then put forth all our energies, conscious of hidden strength from above. But without this humble dependence on God, and single eye to duty, self-reliance is only another name for self-conceit, and it will fail us where we want it most, at the end of our course. For the end of life is the test of life, and until that end many things assume a disproportionate importance! How many characters do we find in history which seemed great to their contemporaries, but which dwindled into insignificance as soon as they were estimated by posterity! Their end is to be speedily buried in oblivion. Their names possibly are recorded, but little more is known of their actions.

After these introductory remarks, I shall endeavour to explain further the meaning, and apply the spirit of the text; ~~first~~, to the general aims and objects of the christian life; and ~~secondly, to the life of the christian minister.~~

A general reference only is required to shew you how entirely the description here given of Gideon and his three hundred men, accords with the life of the christian.

Gideon was the chosen captain of the Lord's host, and a deliverer of Israel from their oppressors. He was called to contend with numberless adversaries encompassing him on every side. His small army, originally only a few thousands, was reduced to a very insignificant and apparently contemptible force, by the express command of God, who ordered three hundred men, and no more, to be selected; and designed by these three hundred to save Israel from the Midianitish host. Every step in this contest reminds us of the chosen band of twelve Apostles, whom our Saviour ordained to overcome the world. Gideon's attack was made, and proved successful. The vast host, surprised and confounded, fled, and in their panic trampled each other down, and were followed by Gideon and his three hundred men, "FAINT, YET PURSUING."

Experience in real religion is only wanting to apply the touches of this picture to ourselves. It is indeed very possible for persons to go through the world for many years without any sufficient apprehension of the number and malice of their spiritual foes. In a few, but a very few instances, this may arise from innocence of the guilt of the world, inexperience of its snares, and from having been brought up in pious and enviable retirement. But too often it arises from heedlessness and self-deception. A man who mingles in civil, military, or political life, or who engages in trade, must be very ignorant of himself and of all that is going on around him, not to see how many and various are the temptations that beset him; and how difficult it is to preserve an upright, honest course, neither allured by profit, nor turned aside by fear. The love of the world and the fear of the world present themselves to us in a thousand shapes, and the contest is carried on every day. Some are allured by the lust of

the eye; some by the debasing desire of intemperance; some by greediness and gluttony—a bait perhaps even more deceitful; some are mastered by the all-ruling love of power, or even by the wish to be thought great and powerful. With some the hasting to be rich by all means, honest or not, prevails to their destruction. Oh, who can count the snares which Satan lays, “like limetwigs set to catch the winged soul,” and lure it to its ruin? And as in that terrible assault at the Crimean fortress not a moment passed for three whole days without a missile of destruction, so, perhaps, if we could see it, the spiritual conflict is maintained, not for three days, but during our whole lives, with scarce any intermission. Sunday is no day of rest for Satan, but a very busy day indeed for him. He follows us to church; he assails us at our prayers, for prayer is his destruction. He turns the food of the soul into poison. And if he cannot induce us to turn a deaf ear to counsel, he hinders its effect by prejudice, carelessness, hypocrisy, vanity, or some other sin; and succeeds too effectually in removing the impression from our minds. No sooner are we out of church, than politics and business begin again, and scarce stop for an instant all the rest of the day. Then how small is the benefit of the sermon or the prayers! Alas! are we all aware that this game is being played out, and that our souls are at hazard? What are all our political conquests or losses, compared with this one great success or failure?

But there are those, blessed be God, who, by the grace of Christ, are “conquerors through Him that hath loved us.” You, my brethren, know your danger, and the power of your adversary. You have taken to you the whole armour of God. You have put on truth as a girdle, and righteousness as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation

as a helmet, and the Word of God is your sword, and faith in an unseen but ever present Saviour is your shield against the fiery darts of the wicked one. You know in whom you have believed. Every year that you live, you know more of your own helplessness, and more of the power of Christ dwelling in you. Your love of prayer and your hatred of sin grow stronger. Your desires find ready wings and fly away to your heavenly home, where your chief hope is, where your elder brethren are, where a vast multitude of the redeemed have entered in before you, and having once wrestled, as you do now, with sins, and doubts, and fears, have at length possessed the promised rest. Well then may you thank God, and take courage. Great is he who fights against you; but greater is He who fights for you. The one is the strong man armed; but the other is He who hath "taken from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and hath divided his spoils." The one is the fallen archangel; but the other is the Lord of Glory. The one is like the raging stream whose waters cast up mire and dirt; but the other is that God who controls the ocean in its fury, sets bars and doors to its proud waters, and says, "hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther." How unspeakably blessed are the possessors of that living faith, which has Omnipotence on its side; the followers of that Jesus who walked the waves, and stretched out His hand to save the sinking Apostle, and descended into hell, and rose again triumphant from the grave; whom all the legions of hell could not bind, nor detain from ascending into glory as your Saviour and forerunner. Yet you feel your weakness, you feel it daily and painfully. How often, like Gideon's troop, are you *faint* though still *pursuing*; sometimes weary of bodily toil, almost beyond your strength, of pains and anxieties which seem more than a match for you, of afflictions which find

no issue, of sorrows which have no vent, of tears which no friendly hand altogether wipes away. And when your body is not oppressed, your mind grows faint under the weight of temptation, and sinks under the remembrance of duties omitted, or half discharged, of sleepy prayers, and sad failures, of hasty words, and defiling thoughts, and sins known only to your Judge. You know the weight of those words which careless sinners utter to their perdition, "the remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable," and they press heavily upon your soul.

Yet, though faint, you must not, you will not turn back. The contest once begun, the word is, Onward. There is no halting, no remission, no resting-place but the grave. The battle rages till our Master calls us, and our fight is over, and we see what we have won, and how well it was worth the contest. The soldiers who enter the breach see nothing but the enemy, and the smoke and confusion of the battle; but the General knows the importance of the position. So is it with the Christian Warrior. Though faint, let us be faithful unto death, and our King will crown us with a crown not made by human hands, nor to be estimated by measures of human value, but a crown of life; life spiritual and eternal, in the full fruition of God's glorious presence, in the contemplation of His wondrous perfections, in active and endless obedience to His wise and righteous laws, in absolute and peaceful conformity to His most holy will. Then all that is His will be ours; ours never to lose, ours ever to retain, and increase in the enjoyment of it world without end.

Let me now shew in the second place, how applicable the text is to the life of the Christian Pastor. And you,

my younger brother, now set apart for this great and holy work, will find, if you be sincere and earnest in your vocation, as I hope and believe you to be, that this text, explained at your ordination, very fitly describes what will befall you in your ministerial life. Most of your trials are yet to come. Yours is no gay holiday task, easily performed, and abundantly rewarded. Your temporal reward is not likely to be great; nor by any means so large as that of the laymen who surround you: and your labour will often be great, and, in this world, unrequited. Nor are you sent to minister to large and fashionable congregations of eager partizans, hanging on your lips, nodding with approving smiles, and applauding the words you utter, whether they be words of truth and soberness or no. You are sent to look after a few sheep in the wilderness, scattered, poor, and often ignorant, unhappily surrounded by a great number of sects, and amongst these the members of the Church of England lie here and there, scattered up and down, and in no one place many together. It will be your duty to collect, to assist, to feed, to support, to invite and win them to the truth, and warn them against heresy and error. And these poor people will not be always, it is to be feared, men of right minds and good dispositions. Some may be intemperate and lawless; some so wilful and self-conceited, that they will be with difficulty won to submit to any thing but their own will. Some will listen to you for a while gladly, and on the first difference of opinion from them will, perhaps, forsake you. But what would that Pastor be worth who should make his standard of doctrine the changing opinion of each member of his flock, instead of delivering to them the message of God in all its fulness and integrity? Shun this coward fear.

Thus you will have your trials. Weary and worn, you

may be faint; yet though *faint*, always *pursue*. Never tire of the work itself; nor look back, for your hand is at the plough. A Clergyman cannot lawfully desert his calling for secular business, still less can he suffer himself to be wearied out by evils arising from his own heart, or from the lives of others. Every day give yourself to solemn prayer, before you begin the work of the day. Let your household or the place where you reside be a little centre of piety to the district, and the source from which the blessings of salvation flow silently around. And remember above all things that not criminal indulgence only, but that sloth and vacillation are ruinous to a Pastor's welfare.

In conclusion, how certainly is it your duty, my brethren of the laity, to offer up at this time, and at all such seasons, humble and hearty prayers to God for the success of this our brother, and of all who have been, or shall be set apart to the work of the Ministry by the due imposition of hands. Exchange, I beseech you, the light and frivolous criticisms which men hastily pass on our manner or outward appearance, for real humble prayer. Your souls will then be as much benefited as our own. You are bound in particular to pray for the Bishops and Clergy of your own Communion. When the Ember-days come round,* do you so pray for them? I very much fear that there are some so little acquainted with their Prayer Books as scarcely to know what the Ember-days mean, or at all events, unaccustomed to make a proper use of them. Surely at these solemn seasons appointed by the Church for general Prayer, when most Bishops make a point of ordaining, (and I have never ordained at any other season, except in cases of necessity), you ought to

* The Ember-days at the Four seasons are the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after the First Sunday in Lent, the Feast of Pentecost, September 14, December 13.

be fervent and humble both in private and public prayer, that a larger blessing may descend upon such ministrations appointed by the Lord for the edifying of His Church. Thus then, labour to be "perfect," to be "of one mind," to "live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

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